

About the National Head Start Fellowships Program

The National Head Start Fellowships program was established in 1996 to create a new cadre of leaders in the early childhood field. The Fellowships program brings together experienced and dedicated professionals who support the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in developing and implementing long-term quality improvement initiatives.

Supported by the Office of Head Start (OHS), the National Head Start Fellowships program provides funding for up to ten fellowships each year. Through these fellowships, outstanding leaders in the early childhood community have the opportunity to gain first-hand experiences that offer a national perspective into the operations of ACF and other Federal agencies serving children and families.

The National Head Start Fellowships offer a multifaceted work experience. Fellows spend their year working full-time contributing their special skills and perspectives from the field to support the Administration's initiatives and priorities. Fellows work side-by-side with senior managers, policymakers, and researchers. Assignments demand a high level of professionalism and flexibility, a capacity for learning quickly, and a willingness to be a team player. Fellows assume important responsibilities within ACF, including the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care. Their work often involves conducting analyses, preparing reports, drafting position papers, reviewing research findings and proposed legislation, assisting with policy analysis, and participating in strategic discussions about services to children and families. Flexibility and adaptability are key to a successful fellowship experience.

In addition to work assignments, the Fellows take part in professional educational and leadership development programs. Fellows attend briefings and seminars to explore national issues with senior government officials, nationally recognized experts, community leaders, and innovative early childhood program practitioners. Leadership Development seminars provide training and opportunities for Fellows to practice and refine their leadership skills. Each Fellow has a mentor who facilitates participation in meetings with nationally recognized professionals and assists in establishing a personal network of contacts. Fellows also are provided opportunities to network with past Fellows who often provide valuable insights on how to maximize the Fellowship experience and survive the challenges of working within a national bureaucracy.

The National Head Start Fellowships program is administered by the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

WORK ASSIGNMENT

The work assignment is central to the National Head Start Fellowships program, presenting each Fellow with ever-changing issues and challenges that promote personal and professional growth.

Work assignments in Washington, D.C., are determined on the basis of ACF needs and Administration priorities, as well as Fellows' expressed interests, skills and goals. Fellows receive

a stipend and benefits, including health insurance, through the Office of Head Start's Head Start Resource Center.

Head Start Fellows have the opportunity to provide briefings on their Fellowship experiences. They are required to submit monthly reports that describe their activities, achievements, and insights, and that raise issues for ACF consideration.

At the end of the Fellowship year, Fellows return to their communities more experienced in policy, planning, and decision-making because of their national experience. Fellows are also better positioned to play a leadership role in providing comprehensive support to children and families.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Professional Development component of the National Head Start Fellowships program augments and amplifies the work experience. It involves meeting informally with experts in fields both within and outside of their job assignments to discuss issues of national importance, current research, and theory.

There are three elements to the Fellowship's professional development component:

- The **Leadership Development Seminars** are designed to explore what it means to be a leader and assess, develop, and support leadership skills. Its goal is to support the development of exceptional leaders who bring confidence and broad knowledge to the field.
- **Site visits and Briefings** enable Fellows to explore national issues with senior government officials, nationally recognized experts, community leaders, and innovative early childhood program practitioners
- **Mentors** support individual professional development, facilitate participation in meetings with nationally recognized professionals, and assist in establishing a personal network of contacts.

One of the goals of the National Head Start Fellowships Program is to establish a Fellowship class environment that offers both diversity and cohesiveness and serves to challenge Fellows to broaden their horizons. Indeed, what Fellows learn from each other is an essential dimension of the program. To facilitate this, there are opportunities for Fellows to network with one another throughout the year.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, supervises the selection process. Candidates are sought who demonstrate accomplishments in their careers, substantial content area expertise, and high levels of personal and professional achievement.

The broad scope of the National Head Start Fellowships program distinguishes it from most other Fellowships. While comparable programs tend to focus on people within a specific field or single area of interest, this program acknowledges that strengthening the family and developing the potential of young children demand many professions, talents, and viewpoints.

The purpose of the Fellowships program is to enhance the ability of Head Start Fellows to make significant contributions to their programs and the broader early childhood community.

Those selected must be working in the field of child development and family services. U.S. citizenship is required. Federal employees are ineligible for consideration as Head Start Fellows, as are contractors of the Administration for Children and Families (i.e., national contract staff and TA providers).

The selection process seeks to establish a cohort of individuals whose diversity broadens the horizons of each Fellow. Overall geographic diversity—urban and rural—as well as a mix of academic disciplines and career experiences are considered. Since the program is designed to nurture leadership, professional growth potential is also a criterion in the selection process.

There are no restrictions on age, race, sex, creed, national origin, sexual orientation, or marital status, nor any physical requirements. The Fellowships program maintains a strictly bipartisan tradition.

APPLICATION CALENDAR

October 1, 2011

Online application process opens for the 2012-13 National Head Start Fellowships.

January 15, 2012

Application deadline. The application package must be submitted on or before this date to be considered. An initial review of the application for compliance with the application requirements and preliminary assessments is then conducted.

February 10, 2012

Approximately 15 candidates will be named National Finalists. These individuals will be invited to interviews with the Administration for Children and Families in Washington, D.C. Travel expenses will be paid by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start.

April/May 2012

Awards of up to eight Fellowships will be announced.

July 2012

The Fellows will participate in a Housing Search in preparation for their move to Washington, D.C.

September 1, 2012 – August 31, 2013

Inclusive dates of 2012-2013 Fellowship year.

CONTACT US

The National Head Start Fellowships program is coordinated through the Head Start Resource Center on behalf of the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Feel free to contact us at OHSfellows@headstartinfo.org.